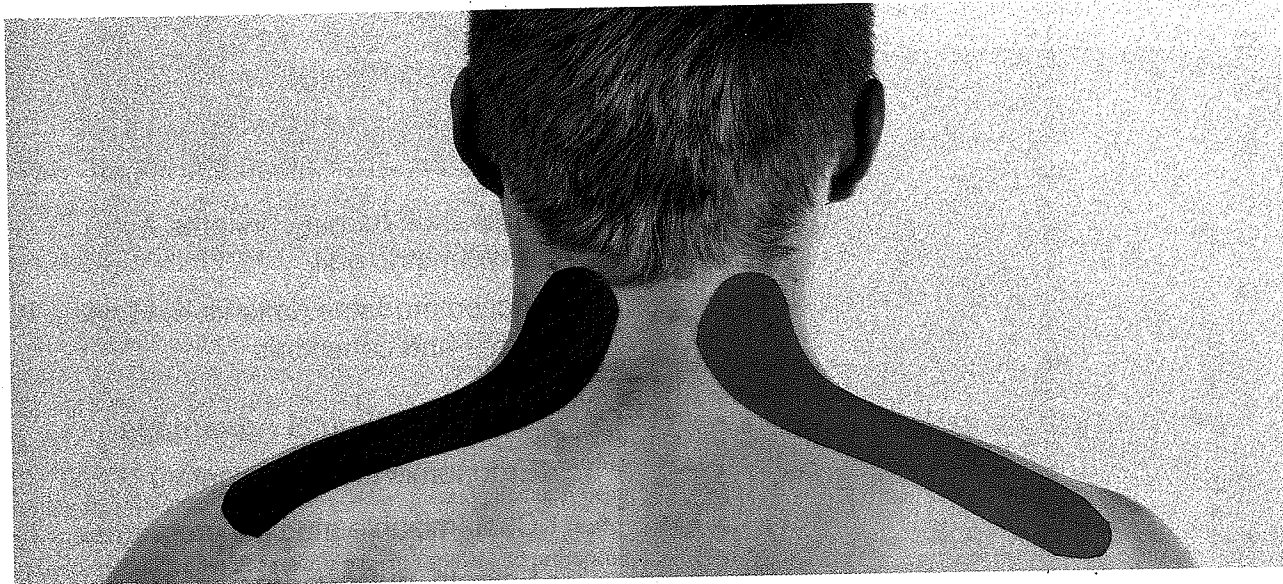


Taped for Recovery

Exploring therapeutic taping for treatment of sports injuries.

by Rob Brandon, MPT, ATC, CKTI

Photos courtesy of the author



Youth and adults are participating in sports and recreational activities at an increasing rate. By far, the most common sports injuries are sprains and strains.¹⁻⁴ Popular Internet search engines display results in the millions for “sport injury treatments.”

To narrow the investigation, one can add “therapeutic (or elastic) tape.” To further the whittling process, one can seek specific body regions. Here, one will find information about plantar fasciitis, ankle sprain, knee pain, hamstring strain, low back pain, and shoulder impingement among just a few.

Pediatric, orthopedic, neurologic, and sports are just some of the groups in which this tape is used. Clinicians who specialize in the treatment of lymphedema have also recognized the benefits of this unique tape. Naturopathic doctors (NDs) and licensed acupuncturists (LAc) are also among groups who have seen the value of including this tape in their treatment plans.

How can therapeutic tape have such a wide effect on so many different populations and conditions? In his book, *Every Second Counts*, professional cyclist Lance Armstrong writes, “It is a special hot-pink athletic tape that came from Japan and seemed to have special powers.” Recently, we are gaining a better understanding as to how therapeutic tape is having the effects of “special powers” on our bodies. Research is ongoing to provide more evidence as to the efficacy of therapeutic tape and the application method. Studies are demonstrating positive results in support of the benefits that have been observed since the mid 1970s. These studies have looked at the effect on decreasing pain; increasing muscular strength/endurance; improving range of motion, neuromuscular control, and circulation; and allowing for 24-hour treatment.⁵⁻⁸

Once the tape is applied to the skin, there is an effect on the superficial lymphatic system, vascular system, and neurologic mechanisms.⁹⁻¹⁰ The goal in treatment with this method is to assist

the body in achieving homeostatic regulation. Although 90% of those who use therapeutic tape rely on it for nonsports uses, it is being widely accepted in the arena of rehabilitation and prevention of sports injuries. It is also gaining popularity with regard to sports performance.

REHABILITATION

Along the road of the healing process, acute, subacute, and chronic phases present with changing physiologic scenarios. Therapeutic taping, as Kenzo Kase, DC, intended, can be used in a variety of ways throughout the rehabilitation phases. Of course, to determine the stage of healing, and therefore which treatment plan is appropriate, a clinician must be able to properly assess an individual's condition. Assessment of the condition as rehabilitation progresses is a vital part of optimal recovery and return of function.

To observe the effects of therapeutic tape throughout the rehabilitation process, let's take a look at one specific case: A 49-year-old healthy male presented to a physical therapy clinic 4 days after a severe hamstring strain. The injury occurred at the beginning of track season during pole vaulting practice (Figures 1 and 2). During a thorough evaluation, the initial findings included: antalgic gait patterns, pain, swelling, ecchymosis, muscle spasm, hamstring weakness, and loss of range of motion at the knee and hip. Over the course of rehabilitation, treatments included: soft tissue mobilization, ultrasound, interferential muscle stimulation, ice, therapeutic exercise (in the clinic and via a home exercise program [HEP]), and therapeutic taping. He was seen for 10 visits. At 23 days post injury, he was able to run up and down a 40-yard hill, run 100 yards on a track, and perform a strength and conditioning program geared toward pole vaulting. Not only was he able to return to his recreational activity sooner than anticipated, but he continued to work in the construction field. He did not lose a day from work.